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Christ is the truth [1], the foundation of Catholic teaching

by Laurent Lafforgue

(Poissy, ADDEC annual session, November 19, 2009)

To begin with, I must specify that I have no other right to speak before you than the solicitation of Bishop Brincard and the paradoxical fact that I was able to observe the teaching situation from a distance, without being involved in it. .

I have no direct knowledge of denominational education: I did my schooling in a public school, college and high schools before entering the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. Then I became a researcher in mathematics.

I don't have a family so the problem of sending your children to a school worthy of the name does not arise for me.

Although my parents were not very practicing, I attended catechism, then the chaplaincy of my college and high school of public education. Later, I was "animator" in the chaplaincy of my old high school as well as another.

Apart from mathematical research, a considerable part of my life has been and remains devoted to reading – reading literary, philosophical or religious texts – and to meditating on these texts. Besides, I feel the need not to separate radically within me the Catholic faith, literature, mathematics and philosophy. This makes me original and foreign both among mathematicians and scientists and in so-called Catholic circles. This strangeness is ultimately my main title to express myself in front of you.

I hope to bring you an outside point of view, different from what you are used to.

Expressing myself without being vested with any authority, I wait for my words - which are likely to surprise and shock – be received and judged solely on its content.

To seriously consider the question of education, it is essential to take the measure of the crisis of transmission that we are experiencing. This crisis concerns the transmission of life, the transmission of faith, the transmission of rationality, the transmission of culture and the transmission of knowledge.

The loss of the transmission of faith is observable by each of us in his own family and those around him. One only has to have eyes to see that church attendance has collapsed and continues to erode. The faithful are made up of a majority of elderly people, of whom each decade carries a significant part and of whom a fraction

[1] "Jesus said to him: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. (Jn 14.6)

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only replaced by younger ones. The number of priests, men and women religious in each generation is proportionate to the number of Christians and shows the real state of evangelization in our country. Finally, you know better than I what is happening today with faith in so-called Catholic establishments, both among students, in their families, among teachers and among those responsible for these establishments. The faithful Catholics have become in a few decades a small minority, a part of which perhaps no longer knows very well what it believes and which is dwindling with each generation.

The loss of the transmission of life manifests itself in the most brutal and objectively unbearable way in the official abortion statistics: nearly 250,000 each year, or almost one in four unborn children. This reality is in no way perceived as a scandal by the dominant opinion; on the contrary, the voices of the political and media powers relentlessly proclaim the merits of the so-called “right to abortion” and never express any doubt about what its exercise means concretely. Even among the French Catholic faithful, it is not certain that the people for whom abortion remains a scandal do not represent a minority within the minority. The refusal to transmit life – manifested in abortion and the other forms of destruction of the family, which our legislators accompany and encourage – represents a slow suicide of the people and of the French people. There is no doubt that this suicide is the result of a despair as deep as it is unacknowledged: a despair which consists in doubting the value of life. Our societies no longer seem to represent life except through the image drawn by modern science, ie as a set of mechanisms; which amounts to denying the reality of life. This takes refuge, by force and by reaction, in an arbitrary, emotional and impulsive subjectivism.

The loss of the transmission of rationality materializes in the disintegration of language. This disintegration is glaringly apparent to anyone who compares, a century or only a few decades apart, school notebooks, textbooks, newspaper articles, radio broadcasts, administrative circulars, legal texts, speeches by politicians or books of literature or so-called literature. I hypothesize that the destruction of language that we witness and in which we collectively participate stems from the loss of concern for truth. Every spoken or written word relates to the truth; if we convince ourselves that the truth does not exist and that we are no longer reaching for it, we are stripping language of its deepest raison d'etre and dooming it to lose a little more of its structure and her wealth.

The loss of the transmission of culture first touches its heart, which is classical culture: the culture of ancient Greece and Rome as well as, in our country, that of the 17th century. The marginalization and subsequent destruction of the transmission of the classical humanities probably began with the education reform of 1905 – strongly denounced at the time by the always clairvoyant Charles Péguy – and it has not stopped accelerating over time. from those of the Fifth Republic. Strangely, the generations of French writers who have learned little – or not at all – Greek and Latin or studied the authors of the Grand Siècle interest the rest of the world, however modern, incomparably less than their elders trained by the classical humanities. Undoubtedly the intimate knowledge of classical models led her to place herself naturally at a level of universality and depth to which it is very difficult to climb by her own strength.

The loss of the transmission of knowledge, finally, results mainly from the

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destructuring and impoverishment of the content of the various teachings that have taken place in recent decades. The educational revolution in the direction of a so-called new pedagogy which would no longer be centered on the transmission of structured content, was desired and organized by the people who gradually took power in National Education from the years sixty. Their ideology found its purest incarnation in the system of the IUFM2 and the CFP IUFM but, if I believe the testimonies I have received, the alleged training that is given there is no less perverse than that of the IUFM[3]. The "father" of the IUFM, Mr. Meirieu, has been a columnist for the magazine "La Vie" for years, and one of the main inspirations of the education revolution, Jean Piaget, adorns with his name, it seems, a room of the "General Secretariat for Catholic Education". It is a fact – very painful to me but proven – that many of the destroyers of the principle of transmission of knowledge come from certain Christian backgrounds, although I suspect that most have never had faith.

In fact, I am convinced that the five transmission losses that I have reviewed – affecting faith, life, rationality, culture and knowledge – are linked. More precisely, all ultimately proceed from the loss of faith.

Faced with the prospect of a total dechristianization of France and a pure and simple extinction of French civilization, we cannot but question the validity of what we have been accustomed to thinking and doing in matters of education and instruction. It is natural that this questioning bears in priority on the last decades and, since we are in 2009, on the immediate follow-up which was given to the Second Vatican Council. This requires several precautions: First, to be faithful to the Church of Christ, we must receive in faith the texts of this Council as of those that preceded it. There can be no question of rejecting these texts but on the contrary of reading them with renewed attention. Such a reading brings moreover to realize that, more than once, developments presented as implementations of the decisions of the Council Fathers were directly contrary to the letter of the texts.

I will give only one example which seems important to me: article 116 of the Constitution on “the Holy Liturgy”. It stipulates: “The Church recognizes in Gregorian chant the proper chant of the Roman liturgy; it is therefore he who, in liturgical actions, all other things being equal, must occupy the first place. Let us ask ourselves how many Catholic establishments, how many of their choirs, how many parishes give first place – or simply a place, even a very modest one – to Gregorian chant in liturgical actions.

Second, let's not forget that the Second Vatican Council was convened by Blessed John XXIII to deal with a dechristianization of Europe and the West that has been going on for centuries. Its consequences were felt dramatically in the French Revolution and its aftermath, then in the totalitarianisms of the 20th century and the nihilism that survived them. We must cast a critical eye both on our schools and on those – often Catholic or belonging to other Christian denominations – which were attended in the

[2] The IUFMs (university institutes for teacher training), which are supposed to train future teachers for public schools, have been replaced since 19901991 for the former “normal schools for teachers”.

[3] CFPs (pedagogical training centres) are the equivalent of IUFMs for Catholic education “under contract”.

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centuries so many men who later became enemies of the Church and of Christ.

Third, in taking this critical look, we must guard against thinking that men are the mere product of their upbringing and that their destiny is inscribed in the teachings they receive. The worst temptation in education is to dream of a school that will ensure that its students don't become “bad guys” later. It is perhaps to this temptation that educators have succumbed in recent decades: to build a school of good - a good that is called "human rights", tolerance, peace, solidarity, social and humanitarian action, listening to others, sharing, commitment, respect, ecology, etc.

The purpose of school is to teach the truth. Now, according to Christ's own promise, “the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). Freedom is a risk. It does not make the possibility of evil disappear, on the contrary it exacerbates it, just as it magnifies the possibilities of knowing and serving the supreme and true good which is God revealed in Jesus Christ.

If it is true that we have to question what we have become accustomed to doing and thinking, how do we do it? How to get out of a habitual thought? How to conceive and carry out an action truly more faithful to Christ?

In my opinion, it is not by continuing to obey the principle of the primacy of action which has dominated our world for several centuries in the double form of politics and economics. Holy Scripture does not in fact say like Goethe: "In the beginning was action." She said, "In the beginning was the Logos--the Word, the Word." The word in question is the eternal Word of God, therefore a word which does not come from us and in the face of which the adequate attitude is to listen.

Even with the sole aim of refounding the school, we must, well before thinking of conceiving and inaugurating any new action, and even before beginning to reconstruct a thought, listen to the Word of God incarnate in the Christ.

This primarily includes participation in liturgical offices and the sacraments as well as personal prayer, but the lay person that I am is not the best placed to talk about it.

On the other hand, and since I introduced myself at the beginning of this conference as a reader, I am perhaps a little less misplaced to affirm that it is essential, for each of us, to devote more time to reading Christ than to the cries of the world. Each week of our life, we must devote more hours to reading the Scriptures, their commentaries belonging to the treasury of the Church and the texts of the tradition and the magisterium of the Church which speak directly of Christ, than to lending the ear to the voices of the world which, expressing themselves by all the means of communication, make the seat of our spirits. It is a question in particular of the media, and I include those who call themselves Christians: the majority - in any case all those whose circulation exceeds a few thousand - express much more the spirit of the world than that of Christ and of his Church, and contribute to the ever greater secularization of souls.

I am not saying that one should not read or listen to these media, or those which do not claim to be Christian. I am only saying that we should devote less time to them than to the scriptures and the tradition of the Church. I would add that we must also devote less time to the media and to the mediocre books that overload the shelves of bookstores, than to the great authors, even non-Christians, even openly anti-Christians. Better to read

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Nietzsche that almost all of the articles in "The Life", "The Cross", "The Pilgrim" and other Christian periodicals overflowing with good feelings, because the quality of thought is a very precious criterion on the path of truth, which is the Christ.

Among the readings directly related to Christ, some seem particularly suitable for nourishing those responsible for education.

In the Scriptures, think first of the wisdom books of the Old Testament. Those books contain the principles necessary to design a true education.

The program of the book of Proverbs announced from the first verses, is to "know wisdom and discipline, to penetrate the deep discourses, to acquire a wise discipline - justice, equity, righteousness - to provide the simple with the know-how, the young man with the knowledge and reflection. » (Pr 1,24) Isn't that already a lot, more than most schools give?[4]

Ecclesiastes expresses the doubts that worldly wisdom cannot fail to arouse: “My heart has become discouraged for all the trouble I have taken under the sun. For here is a man who has worked with wisdom, knowledge and success, and he gives his part to him who has not worked: that too is vanity, and it is a grave wrong. For what remains to man of all his pain and of all the effort for which his heart labored under the sun? Yes, all his days are painful and his task is painful; even at night he cannot rest, that too is vanity! » (Qo 2,2023) Who does not feel joined in the discouragement which overwhelms him?

The book of Wisdom exalts Wisdom in moving terms: “More than health and beauty, I loved her and I preferred to have her rather than the light, because her radiance knows no rest. » (Sg 7,10) This single verse that I quote alone contradicts all the voices of the world. Do we ever hear elsewhere that Wisdom is more lovable than health and beauty? Yet the Book of Wisdom proves it to be true. It is indeed impossible for us to quote any profane text which would make hear hymns to health or to beauty which support the comparison with the hymn to Wisdom of chapters 7 and following.

Finally, the Ecclesiastic shows us the way so that we do not get lost and find Wisdom where she has pitched her tent, in Revelation: "The creator of the universe gave me an order, the one who creation made me pitch my tent, He said to me: Settle in Jacob, enter into the inheritance of Israel. (Si 24,8) In my opinion, Christians responsible for education should periodically re-read these books, focus on knowing their deepest comments and meditating on them.

Secondly, and even if it is difficult because the available references are insufficient, we must seek to study at least some of the finest achievements of the Church in the field of education. In the course of her history, the Church has given birth to thousands of teaching congregations and educational institutions which represent a legacy to humanity as remarkable and as precious as the forms of art which she has developed. The monastic schools – particularly studied by Dom Jean Leclerq whom Benedict XVI quoted in his speech at the Collège des Bernardins – deserve to be known in the same way as Romanesque art. The universities, born from the medieval episcopal schools from the and the 13th centuries , Gothic cathedrals. These teaching congregations of the Counter-Reformation and 12th sisters the are among the most

[4] The introduction to this book in the "Jerusalem Bible" indicates that the New Testament quotes it no less than 14 times and alludes to it about twenty other times.

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the Classical Age – the Jesuits, the Ursulines, the Brothers of the Christian Schools and so many others – gave the world models of education no less admirable than the masterpieces of Baroque art. In our time, I confess to being very impressed by the young monastic Community of St John, founded on the study and teaching of what its founder, Father Marie-Dominique Philippe, called "the three wisdoms": philosophical, theological and mystical. I also admire the “Communion and Liberation” movement, founded by Don Luigi Giussani, whose specific charism concerns the relationship between faith and culture in all its human dimensions.

I also believe it is essential to read the Fathers of the Church – including from the perspective of education. They gave the faith its first intellectual developments, historically founding. Faced like us with a hostile society and State, they were able to speak to the world without surrendering to the world, purifying culture and inculturating the faith. Our situation resembling more and more the very difficult one they experienced, we can read them and meditate on them in the spirit of putting ourselves at their school.

From St Augustine, for example, here are three very simple sentences which expose the first principle of a Trinitarian anthropology capable of founding education: "The more a child has a faithful and easy memory, the more his intelligence is penetrating, the more his taste for work is ardent, the more one should congratulate oneself on the natural gifts he has received. (...) So when we talk about these three things, natural gifts, science, the use we make of them, the first point to consider is the power of memory, of intelligence, will. Secondly, we must examine the knowledge acquired by memory and intelligence, the point where the soul has reached by force of will. Thirdly, the use made of it by the will. » [5]

The study of the achievements of the Church in educational matters is not the only inspire us. I am thinking particularly of the Jewish tradition, for several reasons:

The first, the most fundamental because theological, is that there is a mystery of Israel and that this mystery is inseparable from the mystery of the Church. The Church was born in the Jewish people. It has with him scriptural, theological, historical and human links without equivalent in the history of any religion. Since "the gifts and the call of God are without repentance" (Rom 11,29) and that "it is not [the pagan who has become a Christian] who bears the [Jewish] root but the root that bears him" (Rom 11.18), Christians must pay close attention to what the Jewish people live and do, in their astonishing diversity. This is particularly true in the field of education and transmission, to which this people attaches more importance and care than any other.

His genius for education is, moreover, the second reason for Christians to study his tradition and confront it. Allow me to read a few lines from a mathematician friend, of Ukrainian Jewish origin, father of a family of seven children, and who has become a very profound Catholic: "He who once tasted peace, simplicity, friendliness and the sweetness of such a [religious Jewish] family will never forget them. One does not improvise the role of the father of such a family - one prepares for his future fatherhood for years by studying the Torah, the relevant treatises of the Talmud, by tirelessly discussing the difficult questions of family status with his teachers, his companions of study, with an assiduity that the rest of us only encounter in the professional environment..." [6] We admit that, by

[5] St Augustine, De la Trinité, translation by J. Agaesse, Augustinian Studies, 1991, Book X, § 17, page 153.

[6] Excerpt from: Édouard Belaga, The heroic virtues of the paternity of St Joseph and the rabbinical exegesis of the promises made to the patriarchs of Israel, a text which, I hope, will one day become a book.

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By comparison, almost all Christians are in fact devoted as amateurs to the education of their children. This Jewish father, on the contrary, did not neglect to study for several years in a yeshiva, in Israel, even though he had become a Christian. I asked him what Christians should study first to become authentic educators; he answered me by immediately quoting the sapiential books of the Old Testament, mentioned earlier. I agree with him that we Christians would have a lot to learn from the Jews – and particularly from the Orthodox Jews – in terms of education.

The fruits of the education dispensed in Jewish families are manifested by an extraordinary intellectual fecundity. According to a paradox to which we are all too accustomed but which should not cease to amaze us, so much does it redouble the mystery of the Jewish people and of the Church, the Jews have become better servants than the Christians of this eminently Christian institution which is the University. As I am well placed to observe among mathematicians, the contribution of many Jewish people to a discipline of knowledge has the effect, beyond the creativity specific to each of these people, of raising the general level and tearing all the world to mediocrity. However, mediocrity – at least intellectual – too often marks the life of parishes, chaplaincies and, I fear, Catholic establishments. A better knowledge of Jewish tradition and the most direct and regular relationship possible with representatives of Jewish schools would constitute a powerful means of guarding against mediocrity, which is unworthy of the service of Christ.

Finally, we can learn yet another lesson from Jewish tradition: do not put your trust in any state or in any secular power. We need it all the more because we French have been idolaters of the State since the Revolution, Louis XIV or perhaps even before. The Jewish people, on the contrary, learned to do without the State, and to beware of the administrations, in the situation of a minority exposed to a hostile society and powers, which has been theirs for so long. A situation that has also become ours, although we are not used to it and have not yet drawn the necessary consequences. But it is not only a question of historical conjunctures: like the Jewish people, the Church is in contradiction with any society and with any State for theological reasons. The historical books of the Old Testament contain, with regard to the Hebrew state itself, a virulent criticism not only of the monarchical regime but of the state in general. Following the remarkable philosopher Rémi Brague, let us quote verse 8.15 of the first book of Samuel: “He [the king] will tithe your fields and your vines and give them to his eunuchs and his slaves. Here is Rémi Brague's comment: “The word translated by “eunuch” can designate an uncastrated civil servant. I take it literally.

The role of eunuchs in the administration of a state is a well-attested sociological fact, for example in Confucian China, Sassanid Persia, or in Byzantium. But their mention in the very concrete sense receives an incredible depth if we consider the letter of the Hebrew. This literally speaks of "your seeds (zera) and your vines". The State gives the seed to those who can no longer produce it; it puts the fertile at the service of the infertile in order to assure the an artificial posterity. by [7] latter In itself, the State has no fertility, it is only capable of capturing – drying them up – sources of fruitfulness that ultimately come from God. Yet education aims to make minds and souls fruitful, and it has a vital need to be itself an object of fruitfulness, concretely through the creation of new schools. Christians can be

[7] The law of God: Philosophical history of an alliance, Gallimard, 2005, page 61.

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fruitful in matters of schools insofar as they turn to Christ, who is the source of life. But if, in their heads and in their hearts, they prefer the collar of the State or of an administration to the gentle yoke of Christ, they condemn themselves to sterility. Thus, a single verse of Scripture is enough to shed light on the historical evolution of the republican school: the result of the capture by the State of the models of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the Jesuits, fruits of the fruitfulness of the Church, it has become a shadow of itself in barely more than a century despite the ever more colossal resources allocated to it and the dedication of countless teachers.

Awareness of these realities, in the light of the Scriptures, should lead those in charge of Catholic establishments to consider with sympathy and with the greatest interest the Catholic schools "outside the contract" founded and maintained by courageous pioneers and workers of the transmission. Insofar as the founders of these schools, their teachers and their professors are not subject to the State, at the price of the heavy sacrifices that this requires on their part, it is easier for them to be grafted onto Christ as branches on the vine, and thus become sources of fruitfulness. Their poverty and their necessary abandonment to divine Providence are precious riches. In my opinion, they carry the best chances of new life for the Church of France and for France itself.

At this point in my lecture, I could stop. As I have no educational responsibilities, it might be more suitable. It is up to responsible persons to decide when they are truly grafted onto Christ by listening to the Word of God, receiving the sacraments, prayer and meditated readings.

I should like, however, to venture to formulate a few suggestions of principles.

First let me say that I don't agree with the title. [8] under which my talk was announced: it was given to me after I stupidly asked what subject I should speak on. Indeed, I do not believe that “the specific mission of Catholic education is to transmit a conception of the human person in the light of the Christian faith”.

The mission of all teaching is to give the spirit the nourishment it needs to grow and to live, and which is the truth. Moreover, to speak of “specificity of Catholic teaching” is a misinterpretation since “Catholic” means universal.

The Catholic Church deserves her name universal since she is the Church of Christ and, according to the deposit of faith given to her and of which she is the guardian, Christ is the truth. The mission of Catholic schools is to teach the truth, recognized in the person of Christ.

This means first of all that an authentically Catholic education must devote to religious education, directly related to Christ, at least as much time as to any other intellectual discipline. Just as a teaching of the language is necessary, while all teaching is dispensed in the language, so a teaching directly related to Christ must exist, and the other teachings must be distinguished from it without being separated from it. For such teaching, I suggest five or six hours a week, or one hour per school day, from the age of reason until the end of high school.

Experience indeed shows what conclusion most children draw when they

[8] “The specific mission of Catholic education is to transmit a conception of the human person in the light of the Christian faith. What does it mean to teach and educate in a Catholic school? »

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see their parents think of Christ for at most one hour a week, during Sunday Mass, and their nominally Catholic school dedicate to a so-called “religious lesson” a small weekly hour more or less optional and often empty of Christian content: their conclusion logic is that the adults who bring them up and who claim to be Christians do not give more importance to Christ than to the most marginal subjects of secular education. What these children are actually taught is that Christ is not the cornerstone and that we can do without Him. It is not surprising then that the majority of them end up abandoning the Church. The only cause for astonishment is that some remain faithful in spite of everything: this seems to me entirely attributable to the action of the Holy Spirit.

If some are frightened by the burden that five or six hours a week of religious teaching might represent, in addition to secular teachings, let us point out that, today in France, Jewish religious schools devote precisely five or six hours a week to study of the Torah and its commentaries. It does not seem that this is detrimental to the learning of secular subjects by the pupils of these schools, quite the contrary. Many are the great Jewish academics, counting among the best representatives of their discipline, who owe their first intellectual and human formation to Talmudic schools attended during their childhood and their adolescence: I personally know some among the mathematicians.

Before giving some ideas about the possible content of such religious teaching, I would like to lay down two or three general principles.

The first is that, in my opinion, this religious teaching must be a real teaching, consisting of the transmission of a rich and structured content, and subject to knowledge checks. I do not include there either the possible participation in the offices and the sacraments, nor the personal prayer, nor charitable actions inspired by the love of Christ.

The second principle is that this education should, in my opinion, be compulsory in Catholic establishments. Indeed, it would not assume the faith already acquired and would leave the inner forum free to adhere or not, like any teaching. On the contrary, I think that participation in the sacraments or in charitable actions should not be imposed since it requires the free adherence of the soul in faith: when children are young, their freedom is exercised by their parents, who decide on their behalf, and later by themselves.

The third principle is that religious teaching should be at the same intellectual level as secular teaching, that is to say at a level which corresponds to the capacities of understanding and assimilation of children or adolescents. In my opinion, these capacities are today very underestimated in the so-called Catholic establishments as well as in public education. It even seems, if I am to believe my own experience and a certain number of testimonies received, that the contemporary organization of catechisms, chaplaincies and "courses of religion" in Catholic establishments is affected even more than any secular education by a frightening tendency to infantilism and infantilization. On this point too, I believe that it would be salutary to learn about the intellectual demands that prevail in Jewish religious schools as well as in Catholic schools “outside the contract”.

I now come to the content of religious teaching.

I begin with a negation: in my opinion, the content of such a teaching should not

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not be moralistic. What is at stake is to transmit the treasure of the Church; but this treasure is not a morality, even if its assimilation is likely to produce great effects on people's behavior.

The treasure of the Church consists first and foremost in the Holy Scriptures. It is therefore a priority to read the New Testament and the Old Testament, and to deepen their meaning, which is inexhaustible.

To deepen the meaning of the Scriptures, it is essential to get to know and study their great commentators, from the Fathers of the Church to the present day, passing through medieval monks such as St Bernard of Clairvaux, St Thomas Aquinas and many others. We must teach the tradition of interpreting the four meanings of Scripture, inherited from the rabbis and developed by medieval Christian exegesis brought to light by Henri de Lubac

[9]:

P: peshat, the literal meaning,
R: remez, the allusion, the insinuation,
D: derash, the parable, the figurative interpretation,
S: sod, the secret, the divine mysteries, the prophetic meaning[10] .

The most profound commentaries on the Scriptures always expand by illuminating different passages through each other, in particular by weaving ever closer links – allegorical and otherwise – between the Old and New Testaments. This is what the monks of the Middle Ages did and which we no longer know how to do except in a crude and crude way, for lack of sufficient knowledge of the Bible and the tradition of its commentaries. There is an immense field for teaching, of an inexhaustible richness.

In addition to the Scriptures and their commentaries, and in close connection with them, the treasure of the Church also includes the great texts which have been bequeathed to us by the Fathers of the Church, by her Doctors, by her saints, by her mystics, by councils and by popes. Here again there is material for a teaching which more than any other will nourish the mind and the soul.

But the treasury of the Church does not only include texts.

These are written traces deposited by the history of the Church, spouse and mystical body of Christ. We must teach the history of the Church in all these dimensions, in my opinion first of all in a chronological and structured way. This history is rooted in Sacred History, that is to say the history of the people of Israel, and develops from century to century by producing admirable fruits which only ask to become objects of learning: lives of saints which are in themselves a teaching, foundation of monastic orders, missions throughout the world, dogmatic, theological and philosophical studies, invention of universities, works in favor of the poor, invention of hospitals, exceptional contributions to the arts, letters and sciences , legal development.

The history of the Church also includes many serious faults of Christians, individual and collective, which we must not be afraid to teach openly: the fact that Christians, members of the Church, are exposed to evil , is a great theological truth.

Finally, it seems to me essential to study the sacred arts: Gregorian chant, sacred music, Romanesque art, Gothic art, Catholic art of the Renaissance, Baroque art are among the greatest achievements of human genius, these are gifts that the Church,

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[9] Medieval exegesis. The four meanings of Scripture. Éditions AubierMontaigne, 1959, 1961, 1964. Éditions du Cerf, 1993. Reissue planned in the form of volumes XVII, XVIII, XIX and XX of the Complete Works in 50 volumes of Cardinal Henri de Lubac.

[10] I borrow this description from the text by Édouard Belaga quoted above.

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inspired by the Holy Spirit, made to the human family. Their masterpieces appear as marvelous catecheses as soon as they are explained. Without forgetting that beauty is an essential nourishment for the soul, which is thirsty for it, particularly in today's world which is sorely lacking in it. It is not a question of raising a cult to beauty but of studying it as a glorious manifestation of the spirit of Christ, "the most beautiful of the children of men" (Ps 44,3).

As you can see, the five or six hours a week of religious teaching, which at first might seem ridiculously excessive, appear as a strict minimum when we consider the different teachings – richer and more nourishing than any teaching profane – which can be developed in direct relation to the person of Christ.

However, I would like to end this conference with the subject of secular teachings.

Utilitarianism is powerless to found them solidly. Their ultimate justification lies in their indirect relationship with Christ, which I will discuss. The experience of recent decades shows in fact that they come undone when they are no longer brought into contact with the absolute, with the absolute truth, for which we are made, which children wait for without knowing it and whose forgetting discourages teachers, whether they are aware of it or not.

On the other hand, the fact that the relationship of secular teachings to the absolute truth, which is Christ, is only indirect, subtle, and not imposed, reflects the nature of God's relationship to his creation: God created the world by his Word and maintains it in being, but God is a hidden God, who provides man with the space of freedom.

Among the secular teachings, the most essential is that of language, which makes man a rational and relational being.

The learning of reading and writing, of the structure of the language – that is, of the grammar –, of the inflections of its conjugations and of its vocabulary and of its expressive possibilities, is not only one of the religious education, the possibility of which I mentioned. It is the condition. Knowledge of the language is indispensable for listening to the Word of God, and its indefinite deepening is indispensable for understanding the meaning of the Scriptures and for learning what I have called the treasure of the Church.

In his speech at the College of Bernardins, Benedict XVI exalted the link between the study of language and listening to the Word of God. He illustrated it with the example of medieval monks, citing Dom Jean Leclercq's book with the eloquent title, "The love of letters and the desire of God"[11]. It was because they were seeking God that the monks studied letters, including beautiful profane letters: this study seemed to them necessary both to penetrate the subtleties of the Scriptures and the commentaries of the Fathers, and to respond to the gift of God by raising to Him a praise whose expression is the strongest, the most beautiful and the deepest possible.

The study of belles lettres by monks became secularized from the end of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, giving rise to the model of the honest man in the classical sense and to the great European literature. But literature is in danger of being lost, as we see in teaching and everywhere, if its connection with the mystery of the Logos incarnate in the

[11] Republished by Éditions du Cerf, 2008.

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person of Christ is forgotten.

Indeed, the link between language and listening to the Word of God is not only a material conditioning. It rests ultimately on the fact that every true word is a spark of the Logos, and that the Logos is God.

Concretely, we must teach secular literature and its history, not as if it were a formal exercise but as a fundamental expression of man in search of what he really is. Baudelaire writes in admirable verses:

"For this is truly, Lord, the best testimony
That we can give of our dignity
Than this ardent sob that rolls from age to age
And come die at the edge of your eternity! » [12]

The second type of apprenticeship in direct relationship with Christ is that of work at hand and technical lessons.

Our Europe, which every day rejects its Judeo-Christian imprint more and more, reserves manual labor for its lower social strata, for immigrants who can be forced to work at will and for people who are modestly said to be "failing at school": in short, for those who have no no choice. In fact, it shares the spirit of the ancient Greeks and Latins for whom work was the lot of slaves. This is, in my opinion, the deepest reason why Europe and particularly secular France are gradually losing their crafts and their industry, after having dissolved their peasant worlds.

On this subject too, Benedict XVI recalled in the same speech to the College of Bernardins that biblical Revelation takes us in a very different direction. Like the great rabbis and following the example of St. Paul, the monks have lived and continue to live by respecting the principle of St. Benedict: "Ora et labora. "Pray and work. »

Work is not only human but divine. It is part of that by which man manifests that he is created in the image of God and for his likeness. In fact, it prolongs the creative work of God. As Benedict XVI reminded us, Christ Himself said: "My Father is always at work and I am at work too. (Jn 5:17).

Children need to learn the work of the hand and the body – on inert matter or in a garden. The value of this work is revealed to them if they are made to study, as well as to the pupils of the technical teachings, the passages of the Scriptures and those of their commentaries which point out in it - and especially in manual work - an imitation of God and a lay to Christ, the carpenter's son. This configuration is magnified when the opportunity is offered to the students to make beautiful objects, even beautiful objects likely to be used for divine worship.

Closely related to the work of the body, and developed from it, are the apprenticeships of the arts. They necessarily consist in the learning of techniques, such as those of the voice, so necessary for the liturgy and for prayer.

The third type of learning indirectly related to Christ is that of the humanities, therefore of Greek, Latin and the great classical authors. The relationship here is paradoxical since the meeting of the Church and the Greco-Latin culture first took place in the context of violent persecutions on the part of pagan authorities imbued with this

[12] Last stanza of the poem "The Lighthouses", Les Fleurs du mal.

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culture ; on the other hand, the actors in the dechristianization of France and Europe in the last centuries were often men of culture who, although they owed the greater part of their culture to the Church, rose up against the Church in the name of culture.

However, the Church never ceased to consider that its difficult encounter with classical culture was providential, willed by God, and that it is an integral part of its tradition. This was again expressed and articulated by Benedict XVI, in particularly strong and impressive terms, in his speech at the University of Regensburg.
The critically purified Greek heritage is part of the Christian faith in the sense that not acting "with the Logos", that is also with reason, is contradictory to the nature of God.

Concretely, I think that we should be interested in the model of "classical high schools" which continues to exist in Italy. Every Italian city has at least one such high school. All students study Latin – five hours a week from fifth grade – and Greek – four hours a week from fourth grade. They also study philosophy – not by themes as in France but by going through its chronological history – for three years, from the second to the final year. On the other hand, and since you can't do everything, they study mathematics only a little, and the natural sciences almost none. Nevertheless, most of the Italian mathematicians and scientists that I know come from classical high schools, as were almost all the men of science in Europe until the first half of the 20th century : serious learning of humanities makes it possible to study everything at university.

Not all students are made for the humanities, but some are eminently so and could devote themselves to their study with great profit. I would very much like there to exist in France, as has been the case for centuries, at least a few Catholic establishments similar to the "classical high schools" of Italy. The study of Hebrew could also be made possible there: along with Greek and Latin, it is the sacred language of the Church.

The fourth type of learning in indirect relationship with Christ is that of mathematics and modern natural sciences.

The existence of these rests on the possibility that the human mind has of developing a rationality entirely subject to necessity, entirely constrained - which is mathematical rationality -, on the submission of the physical world to the same necessity, and on the ability given to man to pay attention to reality, in particular to material reality.

The physical world obeys a rationality because God created the world by his Word, which is wisdom. We read in the book of Proverbs: "I, Wisdom, live with know-how, I possess the science of reflection. (...) YHWH created me, the first fruits of his work, before his most ancient works. From eternity I was established, from the beginning, before the origin of the earth. When the depths were not, I was born, when the springs of abundant water were not. Before the mountains were planted, before the hills, I was born; before he had made the earth and the countryside and the first elements of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he traced a circle on the surface of the abyss, when he condensed the clouds from above, when the sources of the abyss swelled, when he assigned his end to the sea - and the waters will not cross its edge when he laid the foundations of the earth, I was at his side like the master builder, I delighted in his delight, day after day, frolicking all time in his presence, – frolicking on the surface of his earth and finding my delight among the children of men. (Pr 8, 1231)

The trace of the action of Wisdom in creation appears in a form

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impersonal like necessity, for the theological reason that creation is not God.
Man has the ability to grasp the laws of this necessity because he is created in the image of God. Finally, we can make the hypothesis, following the remarkable philosopher and writer Fabrice Hadjadj, that the greatest attention to reality, including material, which founded modern science by going beyond Greek science, is consecutive to the deepening eucharistic dogma: we "passed in Latin Christianity from a logic of the symbol to a logic of the real" when "the effect of the [13] transubstantiation (at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215) was

This is why modern mathematics and natural sciences are linked to Christ, and this must be explained to the students. But I believe that we must also teach that wisdom is more than necessity, that the created world also lets us perceive something other than mere necessity and that the real, even material, cannot be reduced to its measurable objectivity. since, first of all, it is sensitive and impresses our flesh. I therefore think that the advanced teaching of the modern natural sciences should be accompanied by philosophical and theological teaching which exposes their foundations and presuppositions, and which shows their constitutive limits.

At least until the end of middle school, or even that of high school for the vast majority of students, it would seem reasonable to me to offer a teaching of mathematics and science limited to arithmetic, the Euclidean geometry of the plan and the space, and to the technical and physical problems which it is possible to solve by these elementary means. As soon as we propose problems whose statement includes a single question and whose solution requires a reasoning in several stages that must be elaborated and written with care, this would also have a formative value. , mathematics and science far superior to what is practiced today in high schools under the name of mathematics or physics, including in the famous "terminal S".

On the other hand, it is deplorable that mathematics and the natural sciences are absent from French Catholic universities and that Catholics are very rare to become researchers in mathematics, physics, and probably also in engineering. These disciplines seem to me to be much better founded theologically, and more suitable for the praise of God, than the so-called "human and social sciences" which have invaded Catholic universities when, transforming men into objects, they are opposed by definition to any Christian anthropology.

The essential, in any case, is not there. The main thing is to put Christ at the center of our life, our readings, our studies, our teachings and our research. Only in Him will our researches, our teachings, our studies, our readings and our life find their meaning and their unity.

[13] The Mystical Lamb: The altarpiece of the Van Eyck brothers, Éditions de l'Oeuvre, 2008, page 14.